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ABSTRACT

Education systems in the United States are still reeling from the shock of the recent wave of poor immigrants from Central America. The necessary preparations have not been made to meet the basic needs of the newcomers, while they in turn face an even greater dilemma: survival in a society that blatantly ignores their dreams and aspirations for the future. There is a need to fill the gap between research and an effective education for these language minority people as well as for more meaningful involvement of parents and of the community in the schools; Head Start and Family Literacy are model programs in this area. Informal classroom research on two young Salvadorean refugees, Juan and Chirilagua, conducted as part of the focus on gender, race, and poverty of a graduate psycholinguistic class at the University of Maryland, is presented. The students' backgrounds are described and ways in which the teachers in the students' school system provided for these students are emphasized (e.g., gathering clothing from fellow teachers, assuring the students' participation in the school breakfast and lunch program). A memorandum from Henry Amador addressed to his fellow teachers and describing the "lesson in humility" he had learned from Chirilagua's unselfish use of his small salary, and two questionnaires are appended. (JP)

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POVERTY AND THE ESOL CLASSROOM

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Our voices trail off toward the last words in the pledge of allegiance, "with liberty and justice for all." Do these words speak to and for us? Liberty to live one more day and put off the dreams we had? Is this justice really for all, including us, or is it only for those with "papeles legales" or "solamente para los gringos?"

The voices of the children in our classrooms tell a different story. They tell of a land faraway where the birds sang and the sun smiled every morning; of towns and lakes and mountains in their countries whose names they'll never forget; of four uncles who were last seen when "el gobierno" took them away from the farm for a short "interrogacion," never to return; of walking across Central America and swimming across "tres rios" to reach the Mexican border and then being turned back and trying again until reaching the safe heaven of Casa Romero which no longer is; of the thieving "coyotes" raping their sisters and their mothers and the Mexican "federales" taking what very little they had; of running through fields of snakes and scorpions praying that they would not bite through the heavy socks and the pants; of mothers and fathers seldom seen who work "dos o tres malditos trabajos" so they can survive in this cold country; of fever and pain and sicknesses and rotting teeth that have to be cured with home remedies or across-the-counter medicines or "a lo macho" because they can't afford the exorbitant rates of doctors and dentists; of broken families and step-parents and incest and rape; of long hours of work

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after school with very little time for homework and even less for studying; of empty and cold stomachs that do not know a breakfast; of the school lunch that is the only hot meal of the day; of having to drop out of school to work because the adults at home had their work permits revoked; of working more than forty hours after school without any benefits and still receiving part-time pay; of an overcrowded room where four adults and six children sleep on two mattresses on the floor and the newborn asthmatic baby sleeps in a walk-in closet; of being surrounded by so many nice homes with manicured lawns but of life in virtual isolation in the prisons of low-rental housing; of a mother that was never known or the one that may be dead-God-knows-where; of rent and utility bills that have to be paid even if there is no money left for food; of teachers who love us and of teachers who would prefer that we had never come; of having no place to go on a sunny day off; of being assigned to a general or consumer math when algebra and geometry have already been mastered back in our country; of wanting to mix with the "anglo kids" but not getting the opportunity to do so; of night activities at a school that is impossible to reach if not by the school bus; and of sadness and emptiness and so many dreams deferred.

An Overview

Our systems of education are still reeling after the initial shock of the recent wave of immigrants from Central America. We are faced with the undisputable fact that we had neither forseen the magnitude of this immigration, nor made the nessary preparations for its integration into our society, especially in education, housing, employment and health services. Our newcomers face an even greater dilemma: survival in a society that blatantly ignores our aspirations and dreams for the future, and most of the

times just chooses to ignore us. However, to conscientious educators and thinkers, what some see as a problem that defies a solution, may in reality be a golden opportunity and a challenge to further enrich a pluralistic society and make it the "great democracy of the twenty-first century."

> The 1990 Immigration act proposes a forty percent increase in the number of immigrants to a total of one million annually with increased immigration from Europe and Africa and no marked change of immigration from Asia and Latin America. The future portends more legal immigrants, refugees and illegal immigrants (Stewart, 1992).

Our education systems need to fill the gap between research and an effective education for our language minorities. It must search for a more meaningful parental-community role in our schools. New approaches must be investigated to return education to the place it belongs: the parents and the community. We must look at the innovations and advances created through Head Start in the area of parent involvement and control of the education of their children and at Family Literacy.

Family Literacy now includes direct parent-child interaction around literacy tasks, reading with and/or listening to children, taking about and giving and receiving support for homework and school concerns, and engaging in other activities with children that involve literacy.

> It must be broadened to include parents working independently on reading and writing..., using literacy to address family and community problems..., parents addressing child-rearing concerns through family literacy classes..., supporting the development of the home language and culture..., and increased interacting with the school system... (Auerbach, 1989).

We must visit the new societies which these new immigrants represent. Who are they? How can we ease their transition from a feudal-agricultural society to our urban, industrial society? From restrictive forms of government

to a democracy where rights and responsibilities exist dialectically? What rich talents do they bring? How can their culture, language and life-experiences be used to further educate them and in turn, educate our society?

We must realize and act upon the fact that poverty affects education and as professional educators, take the lead in affecting changes in our society and our schools to meet the assasination of the most needy members of our American society. We must train our teachers, both in the classrooms and at the universities, to shape their teaching, if not their thinking and class values, to the presence of carriers of other class and cultural values which may stand in conflict with the prevailing middle-class values and culture espoused by teachers, society and the school.

> The inability of affluent-oriented teachers in American society to understand or cope with the behavior of children from economically deprived families is often of paramount importance in aleniating those children from the public schools. It is this clash of value commitment that, more than any other factor, drives our...children out of the school and into the street... They have been attacked at the point of greater vulnerability, their own value structure...All that is needed now to complete their isolation from affluent American society is to be driven away from the schools by a frontal attack upon their own system of self-esteem and their most powerful commitments... Commitment to family is belonging to something...If their customs and habits are challenged by school and teacher, the children are placed in the position of having to choose between the ways of their families and a whole new set of suppositions...Either their world is right, or the world of school and teacher is right (Hickerson, 1966).

Real Faces

Qualitative research has added a vast new panorama to our study of the classroom, its social organization and the meaning-realities within it. As a result, recent research has been enriched and has gained a real applicability to our teaching practices. We can observe and evaluate in the classroom, not to produce tomes of research that can affect little change in the life of our

student, but to make education come alive and of profit to the teachers, students, parents and the community.

As part of the focus on gender, race and poverty of a graduate psycholinguistic class at the University of Maryland we conducted an informal classroom research based on two young Salvadorean refugees who study in our school system. Both are poor, actually destitute if we were to apply our socio-economic class standards to them. They are also "undocumented" and not very sure that their stay in our country is to be permanent or of what tomorrow may bring.

Juan

Juan was raised by his maternal grandparents in a farm in Usulutan, El Salvador. His father had left him there when he was only five years old. His grandparents were the only parents that he had ever known, but Juan was now a man and yearning for life in "el Norte" and his "abuelitos" feared that he would be drafted and killed in the Salvadorean army. At the age of fourteen, after nine months in "el monte," Juan deserted and returned home. His "abuelitos" were afraid of what would happen to him and them. His father had immigrated to the United States and they felt that it was time that he took charge of his son. They sent him alone with their life savings to trek across Central America and Mexico to "la nueva vida." La Casa Romero, a Catholic refugee center in Texas, welcomed him and provided him with bus fare to Louisiana where he worked as a dishwasher to save money to complete his odissey to Gaithersburg, Maryland. This center was closed soon thereafter by church and state authorities but only to be replaced by a loose network of local churches and convents that maintains a ministry of welcoming those "outside our gates."

I taught Juan and he shared with me. He was fifteen, yet worked after school at a local fast food restaurant that could not recruit workers who would be willing to" close." Juan was willing and this meant a night shift from 4:30PM to 12:30AM, six days a week. He was kicked out of his home after five months and shared a low-rental apartment with three other young Salvadoreans. He paid $350.00 a month for rent and also shared the cost of the utilities with his apartment-mates. He bought a used bicycle and would bike from his job back to the apartment, about four miles, in the early morning hours. He came to school late or missed school often, too tired to be able to stay awake in the classroom. Juan moved to another apartment outside our school's ESOL boundaries and was transferred to another high school with an ESOL program. He will not become another drop-out statistic. He still works a night shift at the same fast-food restaurant for the same wages, but now he works longer hours. Juan's dream is to some day go to college to become an ESOL teacher but that dream, like the dreams of his father, may soon become other "dreams deferred."

I told Juan last year that I was planning a visit to his country this summer. He gave me his grandparents' address and a letter to his mother, asking me to please find her and give her the letter. The letter is written in English to show his mother how much he had learned and to make her proud of him.

December 5, 1991

Dear Mother,

I hope that you be all right when you get this letter. because this is the first time that I am going to write to you by a letter but I hope that the next time it's going to be personal or by plane. First, I am going to tell you that I am not doing to good here because I am passing to many problems. One of them is that I am not living with my dad anymore because his wife does not like me much, and I've decided to leave them alone because I thought that I was giving a hard time to both of them. I never liked to

be between any body's life but I don't worry about that. The biggest problem that I am passing right now is been without you. That kills me because I do not know who did I come from, I don't know who you are or where and how you are. I don't know who is my sister. All I know from you is your name but what I really know is that no body is ever going to take your place.

Don't forget that you have a son in the U.S.A. that love you a lots.

Your son,

Juan

Chirilagua

Carlos is from a small rural community called Chirilagua. It is an exoteric name even among Salvadoreans and it's the nickname that his peers have given him, "Chirilagua." He is seventeen years old and is very serious about his education. He is one of twenty-three brothers and sisters, twelve of whom immigrated "al Norte." He lives with his four brothers in a brownstone house that they've purchased through much work.

On March 16, 1992 I was teaching an ESOL lesson at our school and something occurred that left me and the other students somewhat bothered and concerned. I immediately wrote a memorandum to my fellow teachers and the administration (please see attachment). An administrator at our school shared my concern and authorized a questionnaire to be administered to our ESOL students (please see attachment). The purpose of this survey was to understand our minority language students better and to make the necessary accomodations to provide them with the education they deserve. This serves as an example of classroom research that can be of value to both teachers and students. Among an interesting set of perspectives regarding the education of language minority students who were particulary successful academically was the role that the administration plays.

> Principals tended to be well informed and articulate about the curriculum and instructional strategies undertaken in their schools, They were also highly supportive of their instructional staff, taking pride in their accomplishments. They reported their support of teacher autonomy, although they were quite aware of the pressure to conform strictly to district policy regarding the standardization of the curriculum and the need for academic accountability (Garcia, 1991).

Classroom Applications

The ESOL classroom teacher must serve as an advocate and even protector of the language minority students. Among the perspectives observed in a study of the education of successful language minority students, the teacher plays the pivotal role.

> Classroom teachers were highly committed to the educational success of their students: perceived themselves as instructional innovators utilizing new learning theories and instructional philosophies to guide their practice; continued to be involved in professional development activities...had a strong, demonstrated commitment to school-home communication...These instructors "adopted" their students: they had high academic expectations for all of them ("Everyone will learn to read in my classroom") and they served as advocates for their students. They rejected any suggestion that their students were intellectually or academically disadvantaged (Garcia, 1991).

At our schools teachers provided for these students in many ways:

1. gathering clothing from fellow teachers and co-workers that can be used by them, especially coats, gloves and scarves in the cold winter months (special care was taken that there not be any embarrassment for the students...taking the clothing to their home instead of asking them to take it with them in the school bus, for example);
2. assuring that they can participate in the school breakfast and lunch program (special allowance for late buses, not embarrassing them by asking them to form a line in the hallway to pick up free meal tickets);
3. some teachers create a student-centered atmosphere in their classrooms

where students can help themselves to cookies and hot coffee as they see the need;

4. networks of parents, students and teachers search for resources to serve the students (a local doctor sees students, prescribes for them and in many cases has even provided medication for them; a young lawyer provides legal consultation);
5. local churches and institutions are made aware of special individual and collective needs: a local African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church sponsors a school-community soccer team and provides them with funds for equipment, uniforms and tournament registration fees...a Catholic church provides daily meals, emergency groceries and clothing to needy families;
6. teachers' informal networks seek employment opportunities for students and, in some cases, for their parents;
7. teachers make private contributions to help families at times of emergency needs (hospitalization, fires, evictions, etc.)
8. an educational fair was held in the area serviced by our school to bring together Spanish-speaking residents of the community and the different service-components of the school system. This fair was extremely well attended and gave both the parents and the school system an opportunity for dialogue and sharing. A health fair is planned for the future.

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Memorandum

To: Fellow teachers
From: Henry Amador
Subject: Chirilagua and a lesson in humility
Date: March 16,1992

Today I was greatly humbled. Just three hours ago I was teaching an ESOL class struggling with the meaning of the word, "budget." Chirilagua raised his hand confidently, "It's thinking about how you spend your money when you get paid!" I asked him how much money he gets paid.

"About 230.00 every two weeks," he answered.

"Would you buy a stereo on sale for $230.00?"

"No."

"Even if it's really worth $600.00? What about for $150.00?"

"I can't buy it because I have my money in a budget," he almost shouted.

He understood, but I wanted to make sure that his classmates also understood. I asked him to go to the board and detail his budget for the class.

$240.00	salary every two weeks
-$120.00	sent to his mother in Chirilagua
-$60.00	shared with his brothers for house expenses
-$30.00	for transportation to his job in Washington, DC
$30.00	"I can do whatever I want with this. It's all mine!"

Chirilagua is the middle son of twenty-three syblings. There are eleven still in El Salvador and seven are younger than him. The money he and his brothers send home helps to support the family apart from the products of their farm.

His brothers are paying a mortgage of $850.00 a month and Chirilagua shares this cost as well as the electricity, gas, water, food and telephone bills. Chirilagua spends $3.00 a day in transportation. He works in a kitchen in a hotel in Washington,DC from 3:30PM to 12:30AM with only Saturdays off. He takes a bus to the Metro and the Metro to work. The Metro doesn't run after midnight and he counts on "anybody coming this way" to give him a ride back home. He's often left in the highway, half a mile from home and he has to walk alone in the early morning hours to his home.

I asked Chirilagua if he did his homework at work. "No, it would get dirty! I do it at home when I get back from work and then I go to sleep." He gets home at about 1:30AM. If he does only a half an hour of work, he gets to sleep at about 2:30AM. He gets up at 6:00AM to wait for the school bus at 6:20AM and to school by 7:10AM. He sleeps less than four hours and then arrives at school with most of his assignments done and sits in our classes, trying to stay awake and learn!

Today I was greatly humbled. I felt it even more so because I share my brother's blood, his language and his culture. And sometimes, being a middle-class teacher, I forget who my people really are. His sufferings are my sufferings and I should not be so complaisant.

RESULTS OF HIGH SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

A TOTAL OF 170 ESOL STUDENTS RESPONDED (83 FEMALE AND 87 MALES)

A. 53 FEMALE STUDENTS WORKED, 30 DID NOT

45 MALE STUDENTS WORKED, 42 DID NOT

B. 60% OF THE STUDENT FEMALE POPULATION WORKED AFTER SCHOOL

52% OF THE STUDENT MALE POPULATION WORKED AFTER SCHOOL

28% OF SCHOOL'S ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENT POPULATION WORKED AFTER SCHOOL

C. 43% OF FEMALE STUDENT POPULATION LIVED WITH BOTH FATHER AND MOTHER
57% LIVED IN A BROKEN HOME

D. 55% OF MALE STUDENT POPULATION LIVED WITH BOTH FATHER AND MOTHER
45% LIVED IN A BROKEN HOME

E. FEMALE WORKING RESPONDENTS GAVE 55% OF THEIR WAGES TO THEIR FAMILIES
MALE WORKING RESPONDENTS GAVE 56% OF THEIR WAGES TO THEIR FAMILIES

F. 54% OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS WORKED 5 OR MORE DAYS A WEEK
57% OF MALE RESPONDENTS WORKED 5 OR MORE DAYS A WEEK
5 FEMALE AND 6 MALE RESPONDENTS WORKED 6 DAYS A WEEK
NO FEMALE AND 5 MALE RESPONDENTS WORKED 7 DAYS A WEEK

G. 18% OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS WORKED MORE THAN 25 HOURS PER WEEK
1 FEMALE RESPONDENT WORKED MORE THAN 40 HOURS PER WEEK
14% OF MALE RESPONDENTS WORKED MORE THAN 25 HOURS PER WEEK
1 MALE RESPONDENT WORKED MORE THAN 40 HOURS PER WEEK

H. 51% OF THE WORKING FEMALE RESPONDENTS WERE HISPANIC
10% WERE VIETNAMESE
7% WERE TAIWANESE

62% OF THE WORKING MALE RESPONDENTS WERE HISPANIC
12% WERE VIETNAMESE
10% WERE INDIAN OR PAKISTANI

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

CHECK ONE ( ) FEMALE ( ) MALE

IN WHAT COUNTRY WERE YOU BORN? _____

HOW OLD ARE YOU? _____ WHAT GRADE ARE YOU IN? _____

WITH WHOM DO YOU LIVE? _____

DO YOU WORK AFTER SCHOOL? ( ) YES ( ) NO

IF YOU WORK AFTER SCHOOL, PLEASE COMPLETE THE REST OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I WORK ON MONDAYS ( ) TUESDAYS ( ) WEDNESDAYS ( ) THURSDAYS ( )
FRIDAYS ( ) SATURDAYS ( ) SUNDAYS ( )

I WORK A TOTAL OF _____ HOURS PER WEEK

I USUALLY WORK FROM _____TO_____

I'M PAID _____AN HOUR _____A WEEK _____EVERY TWO WEEKS _____A MONTH

THE REASONS THAT I WORK ARE: (YOU MAY CHECK MORE THAN ONE BOX)

( ) FOR SPENDING MONEY (GO TO THE MOVIES, GO OUT, ETC.)

( ) TO BUY CLOTHING, ETC.

( ) SAVE MONEY FOR MY EDUCATION

( ) SEND MONEY BACK TO MY COUNTRY TO HELP MY FAMILY THERE

( ) TO HELP MY FAMILY TO PAY THE RENT

( ) TO HELP MY FAMILY PAY FOR THE TELEPHONE, ELECTRICITY, WATER, GAS, ETC.

( ) OTHER REASONS _____

_____

HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU GIVE YOUR FAMILY FROM YOUR SALARY? _____

HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU KEEP FOR YOURSELF? _____

DO YOU WISH TO ADD ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

_____

_____